What's New with



SCHOOL COMMODITIES

A NEWSLETTER FROM USDA'S FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE

From the Food Distribution Director

ince publication of the fall 1997 newsletter, our agency has reclaimed its original name of the Food and Nutrition Service. We are no longer known as the Food and Consumer Service. Nutrition is the foundation of the agency's programs and is a more fitting description. The agency's mission remains as food assistance, nutrition, and nutrition education.

Food safety

Food safety is one of our top concerns. Although the United States has the safest food supply in the world, USDA has intensified its efforts to look into ways we can make our food even safer. USDA already has some of the most stringent monitoring requirements to ensure that commodities are produced in plants that comply with our specifications.

We are featuring two new food safety regulatory systems in this issue: the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points and the Total Quality System Audit. They are being implemented by FSIS and FSA to improve the safety and quality assurance systems in place. We have also included an article on FSIS' new food safety consumer education campaign, Fight BAC!TM and the latest information on ensuring that ground beef is cooked safely.

We WILL continue to work vigorously WITH YOU at all levels to ensure that we offer safe and high-quality commodities to our schoolchildren and other participants.

Specification review

At the direction of Under Secretary Shirley Watkins, we have undertaken an initiative to review all of our commodity specifications and modify them where necessary to conform to the commercial specification for the same product. We are working with AMS, FSA, other appropriate USDA agencies, and representatives from industry to complete the work. Our emphasis is on ensuring that the food safety requirements in our commodity specifications continue to be the same or better than those in commercial specifications. The review group is first focusing on commodities that have been subject to food safety alerts or have other problems. Eventually, the specifications of all USDA commodities will be reviewed.

Improving customer service

We continue to place great emphasis on listening to schools to understand their needs better and offer improved products. For instance, we have included an article

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on the new reduced-fat cheese blend. Many of you have already been purchasing the reduced-fat process cheese product and have been saying you want a similar cheese from us. Additionally, we have tested a low saturated fat soybean oil that has 1 gram of saturated fat per serving.

On the issue of commodity deliveries, we know how important the timing of commodity deliveries is to the operation of your programs. We have been working hard to deliver more commodities at the promised time and to spread them out more evenly throughout the year. Look inside this newsletter for a chart that compares delivery trends in SY 1994 to SY 1998.

We are very interested in any comments you have on our products or service. If any of you have any questions or comments, we have a new internet address specifically for this purpose: *fdd-pst@fns.usda.gov*, or you can write to the Food Distribution Division, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 3101 Park Center Drive, Room 520, Alexandria, VA 22302.

Les Johnson

USDA Requires HACCP Certification

All contractors and suppliers participating in the Federal ground beef purchase program for SY 1998-99 must be fully operational under the Pathogen Reduction and Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) rule. HACCP is a new food safety regulatory system to target and reduce harmful bacteria in meat and poultry and to modernize the 90-year-old USDA inspection program. It evolved from a program designed to ensure safety of the food eaten by our astronauts in space.

In the years between 1906 and 1993, the meat inspection system was based on what FSIS inspectors could see: evidences of animal diseases, defects, and visible contamination on meat. But dangers to consumers are often from unseen bacteria. As a result, new rules from FSIS now require all slaughter plants to do regular microbial testing of raw meat to verify that the process for controlling fecal contamination, the source of pathogens, is working. All meat and poultry plants, including those participating in the Federal purchase program, must incorporate the new HACCP system. The largest plants are using HACCP now, and the smaller plants will be phased in by January 2000.

HACCP is the systematic identification of likely food safety hazards and the prevention or control of such hazards at established critical control points. This is accomplished through the development of an overall plan and systematic recordkeeping of what was done. It employs modern

scientific methods to verify that the system is working on an ongoing basis. This is achieved by testing, vigilant monitoring, and reviewing records. Each plant verifies compliance with set standards and other requirements through its quality assurance or HACCP-trained people.

All plants must implement sanitation standard operating procedures to ensure cleanliness of facilities and equipment, as well as good employee hygienic practices. Unclean equipment or poor worker hygiene can contribute to bacterial contamination of finished products. And all plants must develop and implement the HACCP system for each product type produced.

FSIS has over 7,000 food inspectors responsible for verifying the safe production of meat and poultry products in almost 6,200 plants around the country. Their presence helps ensure that meat and poultry are properly prepared, handled, stored, transported, and accurately labeled.

USDA expects its focus on prevention, a necessary step in the production process, to result in safer commodities for schools and other outlets. However, HACCP alone cannot guarantee that meat and other food products will be free from disease-causing organisms. The Department recommends sanitary food handling and thorough cooking using a food thermometer as the most reliable means of reducing the risk of foodborne illness.

For more information on HACCP, you can access FSIS' web site at *http://www.fsis.usda.gov*.

Let's Ensure Quality Foods for Our Kids

Over the next 5 years, USDA will implement the Total Quality System Audit (TQSA) for all vendors who sell food products to FSA. This is a program that will consistently provide high-quality commodities to schools and other program recipients through its intent to ensure food safety and quality of the product. FSA purchases grain, vegetable oils, peanuts, peanut butter, and dairy products for NSLP.

TOSA uses the standards of the International Organization of Standardization (ISO-9000), which are internationally recognized standards of quality, as the framework for the requirements vendors must meet. TQSA will require vendors to have **documented** and implemented quality assurance procedures in their plants for the manufacturing of food products. These procedures cover the entire production process: from the raw materials coming into the plant, through the finished product, to delivery.

The quality management system, developed by each vendor, will be reviewed by a trained USDA audit team to help ensure that our schoolchildren will receive safe and



USDA will soon begin a quality assurance program called TQSA. It will consistently provide safe and high-quality commodities for our schoolchildren.

quality foods that meet USDA's standards. Vendors will be rated and permitted to submit a bid only if they rate at an acceptable level. Then they will be audited on a regular basis to ensure that they maintain a consistent level of quality within their manufacturing process. Currently, inspections are done during production of USDA products on random samples of finished products. TQSA is involved with the entire system to ensure that vendors have the manufacturing capability to

produce a safe and high-quality product and that they have implemented procedures to verify compliance with USDA standards before production.

If a vendor does not want to participate in TQSA, that vendor will not be able to participate in FSA's purchasing program. By purchasing food products according to international standards, USDA can ensure that the foods our schoolchildren receive are indeed high quality.

What Do You Do When There Is a Problem With a Commodity?

SDA makes every effort to purchase commodities that are inspected for wholesomeness and quality <u>before</u> they are shipped to distributing agencies. All USDA-donated foods are produced in plants that must comply with USDA specifications to ensure safety and quality. However, if a problem occurs—such as failure to

meet specifications, an off-taste, or a potentially serious health hazard—the product will be placed on hold until it is thoroughly checked by Federal graders or inspectors.

The seriousness of the situation determines the course of action. If it appears that a serious food safety hazard could exist, then FNS has a system that quickly communicates the information on the suspected food to the appropriate offices.

What is a food safety bazard?

According to FDA and FSIS, food safety hazards come in four different varieties: chemical,

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microbiological, foreign matter, and naturally occurring material. Chemical problems are primarily from pesticides but are sometimes associated with cleaning supplies and other such chemicals. Microbiological hazards include all the foodborne pathogens such as E. coli, Salmonella, Campylobacter, Hepatitis A, and Vibrio, among many others. Foreign matter includes wood pieces, metal clips, and anything else that doesn't belong in food. Naturally occurring material includes such things as bone chips. But it can include other things that may cause major problems such as big chunks of gristle that may cause choking.

How does FNS handle a food safety hazard?

The very first thing to happen is that FNS will immediately involve the appropriate contracting office at AMS or FSA and the appropriate food safety agency(s), depending on the nature of the problem or product involved. (These agencies are FSIS, FDA, and CDC.) They will confirm and verify that a problem exists and guide FNS on what to do next. Their guidance is invaluable, especially when the situation may involve a nationwide recall or return of product.

At the same time, FNS will determine how much product is involved and where it's been shipped. After we determine this, we quickly communicate information on the suspected commodity to the appropriate FNS regional offices. Those offices will, in turn, contact each State distributing agency. From that point, the local program operators are contacted



When there is a food safety problem, schools will have the important task of identifying, reporting, and holding the entire supply of the suspected food until further instructions.

and advised on appropriate food safety steps, i.e., to hold the product until further notice. This is not a procedure we take lightly.

Each State distributing agency has a communication system in place (either phone, fax, or computer) that quickly provides schools with all the pertinent information on the questionable food.

If the food in question does not meet specifications or there is another problem of a less serious nature than a food safety hazard, then the product will also be placed on hold until it is thoroughly checked. The commodity may subsequently be disposed of, recalled, or released.

Schools' responsibilities

As soon as you receive information from your State distributing agency on the suspected food, you must identify and report the exact amounts you have. It is vitally important for schools to always keep information on commodities such as can codes, lot and contract numbers. These numbers are found

on the package containing the product or on the outside shipping containers. This will enable us to identify the suspected food by the vendor that provided the commodity and more easily correct the problem.

It is extremely important that you place your entire supply of the commodity specified on hold. This food should not be used until you are advised to do so by your State distributing agency. The food may be disposed of or recalled. It is very important that you carefully follow the distributing agency's instructions even when the product is not a food safety hazard.

Some schools have been concerned about problems associated with putting food on hold, such as the amount of time it must be held and the storage space it requires. Determining the problem and resolving it is not always immediate. However, it is important to check each situation completely before reaching a decision on the food. This may involve tracking down all the food to put on hold, reinspecting, testing, and sometimes retesting.

Fight BAC!™

W ith a multi-faceted media program and a major Washington kickoff, a new food safety consumer education campaign was launched last fall by the Partnership for Food Safety Education.

The eye-catching Fight BAC!TM cartoon character delivers four critical food safety education messages to teach consumers about safe food handling.

According to Susan Conley of USDA's FSIS, "What makes this campaign unique is that it really is a public/private partnership. Industry, consumer groups, Government agencies, health organizations—all of us are working together to make this campaign a reality."

In addition, Dagmar Farr of the Food Marketing Institute noted, "This campaign takes the basic food safety messages and presents them in a whole new way. With this campaign, we have the tools to start changing people's food handling behavior."

A highlight of the campaign is a 30-second animated PSA that features the Fight BAC!TM character. The PSA was distributed to television stations nationwide.

According to Sara Lilygren of the American Meat Institute, "All of the print campaign materials are designed so that our nonprofit cooperators can just copy them and go." Key materials include:

- A Fight BAC!TM brochure with food safety basics for consumers.
- A community action kit designed for food safety educators. The kit is camera ready and includes a press release, campaign ideas, logos, and a brochure.



 A supermarket kit with bag stuffers, shelf labels, and camera-ready art. This kit lets supermarkets join the food safety campaign trail.

According to Lilygren, the campaign focuses on four critical messages:

- (1) **Clean**: Wash hands and surfaces often.
- (2) **Separate**: Don't cross-contaminate.
- (3) **Cook**: Cook to proper temperatures.
- (4) **Chill**: Refrigerate promptly. The safe food handling messages are graphically depicted, Lilygren explained, to help consumers visualize the actions that need to be taken. The constant use and repetition of these graphics, along with the Fight BAC!TM character, will allow all campaign cooperators to reinforce these key concepts and raise consumer awareness.

To monitor the effectiveness of the campaign, the national polling company Yankelovich conducted a national food safety survey last September. That survey will be followed up later to assess the campaign's impact.

Industry groups provided more than \$500,000 in funding while other cooperators provided printing and other services, as well as distribution support. "We're always looking for new partners," Farr said, "and we encourage groups to contact us."

Nonprofit health, education, and civic groups can use the materials free of charge for educational purposes. For more information, e-mail the partnership: *fightbac@mindspring.com*, or call FSIS' Public Outreach Office: 202-720-9352, or fax the office: 202-720-9063. For up-to-date information about the campaign, check the web site: *www.fightbac.org*.

Staying Safe With Pink Beef

n the past, a number of methods were used to determine if ground beef had been properly cooked. These included checking the final interior color or the color of juices, using a combination of temperature and a prescribed cooking time, or cooking the ground beef to a certain temperature. However, a number of instances were reported of ground beef that did not lose its pink or reddish color even after it had been thoroughly cooked. Further research has concluded that certain methods, including internal cooked color, are not reliable indicators of doneness. Universities, industry groups, and USDA conducted extensive research to establish a reliable method for preparation of ground beef to ensure the product is safe to consume. Based on this research, the most reliable indicator of doneness known at this time is the final temperature.

If ground beef is cooked to 160 °F internal temperature, the product should be safe to consume. Alternatively, the patties can be cooked to heat all parts of the food to 155 °F and held at that temperature for 15 seconds, according to the Food and Drug Administration's Food Code. The Food Code is a reference that guides retail outlets and institutions on how to prepare food to prevent foodborne illness.

For accuracy when checking, the temperature must be taken from the thickest part of the patty, preferably with a needle-type, digital, instantread thermometer with a 2 to 3 second probe time. This type has a very thin tip for probing thin patties and takes the temperature very



Always be safe with ground beef! Here is the latest research for cooking and safe consumption.

quickly. The digital readout also reduces the margin of error compared to a dial-type thermometer. To ensure safety, the temperature should be taken in two of the thickest parts of a patty by sticking the probe into the middle. This should be done during cooking, if possible, and if a patty is removed from the heating source, the temperature must be taken immediately before the temperature falls. Dial-type thermometers are more useful in soups, stews, casseroles, and other liquids than with probing a patty for temperature, because of the thinness of some patties and the thickness of the stem.

Because it is not practical to take the temperature of every cooked

patty, school food authorities should establish a reasonable percentage of patties from each batch to check end-point temperature. It may be necessary to conduct extensive testing with each new batch of patties to determine correct cooking time to yield 160 °F or the amount of time and temperature to ensure doneness in accordance with the Food Code.

Another concern about taking temperatures is that the actual temperature may vary among sections of the oven or grill cooking area. Therefore, it is very important to measure the temperature of patties from the different sections. If one corner is consistently cooler, for example,

the patties in that area should be measured most often. Regularly scheduled maintenance checks, including calibration of ovens and grills, should be done according to the equipment manufacturer's guidelines.

As with any food item, safe food handling practices must be observed at all times during preparation and serving. USDA's nationwide toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline (1-800-535-4555) is available to help you with additional information about cooking ground beef. You may also access the following web sites for food safety information: www.fightbac.org OR www.fda.gov/agency/fsis/bomepage.htm OR by clicking on "Foods" at www.fda.gov.

September Is National Food Safety Education MonthSM



"Keep It Clean - The First Step to Food Safety" is the theme for National Food Safety Education MonthSM in September. Now in its fourth year, National Food Safety Education MonthSM was launched in 1995 by the International Food Safety Council, a restaurant and food service coalition.

This year FDA, USDA, and ASFSA developed a 17" x 22" poster to help communicate a food safety message to the children about the importance of cleanliness. One side of the poster—the side with "National Food Safety Education MonthSM" across the top—is intended for display in elementary school cafeterias during the month of September. The other side—with the large Fight BAC!TM Logo that includes four key food safety messages—can be displayed afterward as a continuing reminder of

the importance of preventing foodborne illness.

The poster has been distributed to 53,000 food service managers at schools nationwide. If you have received one, please display it in a prominent location within your school's cafeteria where the children will get the message! Also, be sure to send back the reply card that was included with the poster to give your views on its usefulness and what other food safety materials would be helpful.

Because research indicates that poor personal hygiene is a major factor in foodborne outbreaks, it is especially important that children learn early the simple fact that washing their hands before eating can help prevent foodborne illness.

Introducing Reduced-Fat Cheese Blend

SDA made a small test buy last January of a new product, "Blend of American Cheeses and Skim Milk Cheeses." Schools in Hawaii, South Carolina, Rhode Island, and Wisconsin tested the product. It was also tested at a State advisory council meeting, at one regional office, and at headquarters.

The blended cheese can be used as a substitute for pasteurized process cheese and has over 50 percent less fat. Like cheddar and mozzarella, skim milk cheese is a natural cheese and is regulated by an FDA standard of identity. Because the product is composed of a blend of natural cheeses, it is fully creditable toward the meal pattern requirements.

The cheese was purchased from Land O'Lakes and is the same product many States were already purchasing with State funds from Land O'Lakes as "Reduced-Fat Process Cheese Product." Other schools have been purchasing a similar product through contracts to reprocess commodity cheddar cheese into lower fat products.

Acceptability surveys showed the cheese to be consistently "Good" to "Excellent" in all categories with normal to very low plate waste. The product is being offered to schools this year as an entitlement.

USDA Commodity Deliveries Are Leveling Out

D oes USDA know most schools start in September? Well, yes, but some schools may wonder, given the historical distribution patterns of commodities. Recently, because of some legislative and operational changes, USDA has delivered more commodities earlier in the school year. Further, new technology and purchase procedures improved USDA's ability to control and spread out commodity deliveries.

The graph demonstrates this trend, comparing SY 1994 deliveries to SY 1998 deliveries. Note that in SY 1994, fewer commodities were delivered in July through October. Also, deliveries throughout the school year were very irregular. USDA staff worked very hard to change legislation and operations to even out commodity deliveries. SY 1998 trends indicate the flow of commodities is getting more in line with our customers' needs.

Recipe Ideas for USDA Commodities

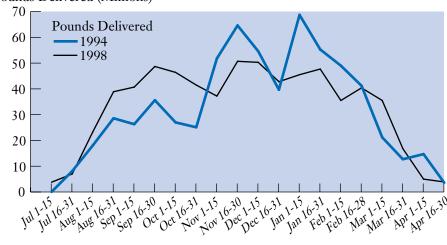
e are offering frozen raspberry puree as a bonus commodity this school year. Try this new product in the delicious Baked Fruit Bar recipe featured on p. 15. Also, set your taste buds for a great idea for commodity salsa. Enjoy this wonderful Empanada recipe. As you know, USDA commodity salsa can now be credited as part of a reimbursable meal in the minimum amount of ¹/₈ cup. (Please note that these recipes and nutrient analyses have been supplied by industry and have not been tested for yield or standardized by USDA.)

The 1994 reauthorization legislation permits States to roll over the remaining entitlement balances into the next school year and also allows USDA to deliver commodities through September 30 of each school year instead of June 30. This provision made more funds available to buy products for delivery early in the school year.

While having funds available helps us to purchase products early in the school year, the market also has cooperated. Please keep in mind that even in an ideal world USDA could not deliver all your food early, but deliveries are clearly improving!

Delivery Trends for Group A Commodities (Fruits, Vegetables, Meat, and Poultry Products)

Pounds Delivered (Millions)



Delivery Periods

IQF Beef Patties

Beginning in SY 1998-99, all beef patty products you receive will be required to be IQF except beef patties with VPP. The beef patties with VPP and pork patties do not have to be IQF, but USDA will pay a premium over the contract price to suppliers who voluntarily provide them. This means that you may receive IQF beef patties with VPP and IQF pork patties, depending on what company receives the bid.

IQF beef patties will be the same product you have been receiving but should be much easier to handle, especially when separating. This is because IQF beef patties are frozen to an internal temperature of 10 °F or below prior to packaging, so they will not freeze together. One thing you will notice is that the IQF beef patties will look lighter in color when they are frozen. Once thawed, they look just like the non-IQF beef patties.

NFSMI Takes Us Into the New Millennium

ood things keep happening at ■NFSMI! As you may know, the Institute serves as a national resource center that conducts research, education, and training activities to improve the quality and operations of Child Nutrition Programs. Previous legislation authorized USDA to establish and maintain NFSMI. The Institute is located at the University of Mississippi in Oxford and works in cooperation with the University of Southern Mississippi located in Hattiesburg. Let's get up to date with all the activities offered since our 1993 newsletter featured the Institute. FNS and NFSMI have come a long way through cooperative efforts to help schools improve their school meals. Here is a rundown on some of their activities.

The help desk (your healthy food line)

This state-of-the-art service is offered to anyone involved in serving school meals and is operated through a cooperative agreement with FNS. With only a phone call to a toll-free number or an e-mail message, you'll have access to a school meals specialist who can answer your questions about planning healthy meals, analyzing your menus for nutrients, USDA approved software, purchasing and preparing foods, recipes, selecting equipment, marketing your programs, and managing within your budget. School meals specialists have access to a wealth of resources through NFSMI's Clearinghouse and can also make referrals to other experts, if necessary.

The Help Desk is easy to contact. The toll-free number is

1-800-321-3054, and it is staffed between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM, CST, Monday through Friday. Voice mail is available at all times. You can fax your messages to 1-601-232-1091 at any time. The e-mail address is: yhfline@olemiss.edu, and you can also find the Help Desk through NFSMI's World Wide Web location: http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/nfsmi.

The clearinghouse

This service offers you access to a wide variety of materials (print, audiovisual, and electronic). The Clearinghouse operates in cooperation with USDA's Food and Nutrition Information Center of the National Agricultural Library, and through this connection, it can lend training materials and other resources, provide access to research findings, develop customized bibliographies, and conduct literature searches. You can get information about all NFSMI services from the Clearinghouse, which also maintains an archival collection of Child Nutrition Programs' materials and a collection of current materials. In addition, many current program materials are offered for sale by NFSMI on a cost-recovery basis. A guide to the publications offered is available by contacting the Clearinghouse at 1-800-321-3054 or e-mail: *nfsmi@olemiss.edu*.

Hands-on team for healthy school meals

This is a new pilot service made possible through a cooperative agreement with FNS. The Hands-On Team is a free service that

delivers on-site assistance to help schools implement the nutrition goals of the School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children. Members of the team are qualified consultants who can provide technical assistance in all areas of food service, including menu planning, nutrient analysis, standardized recipes, food preparation, food storage, food purchasing, equipment, action plans, merchandising ideas, and nutrition education. Site visits began in the fall of 1997, and the pilot program will be available for 2 years. Any school district is eligible to apply for this service. Contact your State agency to request a Hands-On Team visit.

Other services

NFSMI also publishes a number of newsletters, updates, and other helpful materials:

- NFSMI Insights is published several times a year, each one giving information about research or programs being conducted by NFSMI.
- The Child Nutrition Quarterly is a newsletter about all of the current activities at NFSMI.
- What's Cooking? is a fact sheet for child care providers that is published four times a year. It contains helpful mealtime tips, recipes, and menu suggestions.
- Satellite conferences are also very popular at NFSMI. Several of these teleconferences have been held the past couple of years, and more are planned. Some have even been approved for ASFSA Certification Credit!

These activities are only a few of the services NFSMI offers to help you. Don't hesitate to contact NFSMI to learn more!



SDA continues to work with schools nationwide to provide more nutritious meals to students. In support of this effort, USDA made a commitment to providing training and technical assistance to school food service professionals and nutrition education to students. This commitment is being kept; USDA has already made a wide variety of materials and resources available, and SY 1998 will be no exception. Even now, several new and exciting materials are on their way to the classroom and the cafeteria.

Training and technical assistance materials remain the backbone of USDA's support for the school food service professional. This year's offerings include the award-winning "Cooking a World of New Tastes" culinary video series. This is a cooking show for school food service personnel that promotes healthy cooking techniques. It explores new approaches to producing healthy, tasty, and attractive foods for school meals with an emphasis on advancing culinary skills. The videos offer professional chefs' tips for preparing a selection

of the new and ethnically diverse recipes offered in USDA's A Tool Kit for Healthy School Meaks: Recipes and Training Materials. All four self-instructional videos are designed with the convenience of the school food service professional in mind. They can be shown on staff breaks or during a local manager's food service training program.

Another new training and technical support offering is USDA's A Menu Planner for Healthy School Meals. The menu planner is designed to assist school food service staff in planning, preparing,

and serving nutritious and appealing meals. This guide includes chapters on the dietary guidelines and nutrition goals, menu planning options, nutrient analysis, basic principles and processes of menu planning, and practical techniques for healthy food preparation. The menu planner also includes information on how to market and promote the school meals programs within the school and the community and how to establish a cafeteria-classroom link. This outstanding, full-color, 275-page planner will be made available to all schools nationwide in September.

Student-targeted nutrition education and promotion efforts assist school food service professionals by teaching children to

appreciate and enjoy the new, healthier foods they can now find in their school cafeteria. In the last two years, USDA has made significant progress in reaching children on the elementary school level. During SY 1998, USDA will work with school food service professionals and teachers to raise the nutrition awareness of older children. The your SELF middle school kit is one of the first Federal nutrition information efforts to specifically target adolescents, as well as one of the first to promote both nutrition and physical activity to improve health. It encourages 7th and 8th grade students to take responsibility for their eating and physical activity decisions and teaches realistic goal

setting based on each student's individual needs, lifestyle, and physical requirements. A *yourSELF* nutrition education kit has been sent to every school with a 7th and 8th grade. Contents include *yourSELF* student magazines and activity booklets, a teacher's guide, a poster, a three-segment videotape, enrichment activities, and duplication masters.

By continuing to develop and provide entertaining, creative, and scientifically-sound materials to school food service professionals, teachers, students, and their communities, USDA continues to strengthen the school meals programs and improve the health and nutrition of children.

More Choices for Menu Planning

ow in its second half century of service to America's schoolchildren, NSLP and its younger sibling, SBP, are meeting updated standards for nutrition and are providing local food service professionals with unprecedented flexibility to prepare meals that are both healthy and appealing. This flexibility provides schools the freedom to tailor their meal services to suit their local conditions as well as the appetites and customs of their children. Basically, schools may elect to use one of the following meal planning systems. And a proposed rule is now in effect to include guidelines for other "reasonable approaches." The same nutrition standards are required to be met regardless of the menu planning system selected.

The traditional meal pattern

The "traditional" meal pattern is the meal planning system most familiar to school food service professionals. Only a few changes have been made since its introduction as the "Type A" lunch pattern in 1946. Under this option, schools must comply with specific component and quantity requirements as well as with all crediting policies. Because of its familiarity, it remains attractive to many local meal planners, and, with careful planning, it produces school meals that comply with the updated nutrition standards, including the *Dietary* Guidelines for Americans. However, it provides the least flexibility of all the currently established systems and requires special effort to effectively meet the nutrition standards.

Enhanced food-based system

A second food-based or mealpattern option has been designed to retain the meat/meat alternate and milk requirements of the traditional meal pattern but significantly enhances the quantity requirements for grain/bread products and fruits and vegetables. To provide flexibility in meeting the increased grain/ bread requirement, the Department permits part of this requirement to be satisfied by counting one grainbased dessert each day. This menu planning option appeals to schools that prefer to retain the structure of a meal pattern but wish to balance calories from meat/meat alternates, which are frequently higher in fat, with lower fat foods from the grain/bread and fruit/ vegetable components.

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Nutrient standard menu planning

Since June 1995, schools have had the option of using Nutrient Standard Menu Planning—a computer based menu planning system that does not impose specific component or quantity requirements on school meals. Under this system, approved computer software analyzes the nutrient content of all the foods in the meal service at the same time that the service is actually being planned. Consequently, the planner can determine immediately the degree to which the menus meet the nutrition standards and can make modifications on the spot if necessary.

While meal planners are not bound by strict component and quantity requirements, all meals must contain an entree, milk, and at least one other menu item. This requirement ensures that children receive a reasonable level of nutrients and calories each day, although the meal planner has considerable latitude in deciding what constitutes a menu item and an entree. Nutri-

ent Standard Menu Planning will involve some initial expense to acquire software and, in some cases, hardware. And the initial workload associated with entering recipes and values for processed foods into the system may be significant. However, the flexibility inherent in the system offers opportunities for long-term control of food costs and provides the ability to accommodate many ethnic and religious preferences.

Assisted nutrient standard menu planning

A variation on Nutrient Standard Menu Planning has been designed for schools that do not have the technical resources to conduct nutrient analyses but who would like to take advantage of the flexibility offered by this menu planning system. Under this variation, called Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning, the school would have an outside entity such as another school district, the State agency, or a consultant conduct a nutrient analysis of the meal service and

develop menu cycles, recipes, procurement specifications, and preparation methods that would allow the school to produce meals that meet the nutrition standards. Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning provides for the benefits of nutrient analysis; however, it is somewhat less flexible than the nutrient analysis conducted by the school itself, since any experimentation would have to be reanalyzed by the outside entity.

Any reasonable approach

As an additional measure to ensure local flexibility, Congress directed the Department to establish guidelines for approving other "reasonable approaches" to planning and preparing meals that meet the nutrition standards. FNS published a proposed rule on May 4 that laid out the conditions under which schools may depart from the above alternatives. There is a 180-day comment period provided, during which time we welcome your opinions. Please contact your State agency for further information on this regulation.

Why Are Standardized Recipes Necessary?

A re you a by-guess and by-golly cook? Does your successful and special spaghetti sauce change each time you prepare it? And what about your failures? Remember that cream of broccoli soup that curdled or your scalloped potatoes that were too soupy (or too dry) the last time? All of this anguish can be avoided through the use of standardized recipes!

A standardized recipe provides a list of measured or weighed ingredients and a set of sequential directions for preparation and serving. A recipe like this will guarantee an end product of:

- consistent quality,
- consistent portion size, and
- consistent nutrient value.

Therefore, in food service we need a recipe that has been **tried**

and adapted for use and found to produce the same good results and yield every time when the exact procedures are used with the same type of equipment and the same quantity and quality of ingredients.

There are many "foolproof" standardized recipes available to the busy food service director.
Those provided by USDA include

continued on page 13

Quantity Recipes for School Food Service, A Tool Kit for Healthy School Meals: Recipes and Training Materials, and The School Lunch Challenge Recipes I and II.

If you are inclined to standardize a recipe, it is necessary to try it, test it, evaluate it, and <u>adapt</u> it for food service use. Then it becomes a **customized recipe**, developed for a particular audience, using certain specified equipment. And the same good results can be replicated time after time.

Every time a **standardized** recipe is produced there will be:

- a predictable yield,
- costs that are easier to control, and
- greater inventory control.
 Your food service workers will:
- have more confidence in what they are doing,
- need less supervision, and
- produce products for which accurate nutrient analysis can be performed.

How Do You Standardize a Recipe?

tandardizing Aunt Martha's Spinach Casserole for your school cafeteria is easier than you think! ANY recipe can be modified to reflect new tastes or changing *needs.* For example, you may wish to lower the fat, salt, or sugar content to make a recipe more healthful. First, think small: prepare only 25 portions at a time. Evaluate. What do you think needs to be changed? Make another 25 portions, changing only one ingredient. Evaluate. Is the recipe now how you want it to be, or do you need to modify another ingredient?

With each replication, be sure to record **exact** descriptions of each food substituted in **exact** amounts. Remember, you want to be able to repeat this wonderful recipe that you are standardizing exactly! Follow the preparation instructions closely, and record any changes you wish to make.

Once you have a high-quality product, try the recipe again in a

larger quantity, once again recording any adjustments so they can be duplicated. Then weigh and measure the total volume of the recipe at 50 servings and again at 100 servings. Record the findings. Then measure and weigh each serving, and record these findings. (This is important information for the required nutrient analysis.)

Set up a taste panel to evaluate the new recipe for appearance, consistency (or texture), flavor, and overall acceptability. Based on these responses, you might have to make additional modifications.

When you have the recipe in final form, be sure to tell your food preparers the recipe has been changed so they have no surprises! Explain what changes you made and why they were necessary. And, of course, it is a good idea to remind the food preparers of why *consistently* following standardized recipes is necessary to the total success of a recipe.

Browse FDP's Expanding Web Site

The Food Distribution Program's web site is growing! If you access the USDA FNS web site at http://www.usda.gov/fcs and click on "Food Distribution," you will find:

- The latest issue of this newsletter.
- Facts About USDA Commodities for NSLP and SBP. More than 100 fact sheets provide basic information to help school food service personnel make the best use of donated foods. Also included is a page highlighting new or recently changed fact sheets.
- <u>Foods Expected to be Available</u> for NSLP and SBP for 1999.
- Foods Expected to be Available for TEFAP, CSFP, and FDPIR for 1999. Separate lists for each program.
- "Best If Used By" Charts.
 Charts that list the "best if used by" dates for storage of USDA commodities at various temperatures. Separate charts for schools, TEFAP, CSFP, and FDPIR.
- Improving USDA Commodities. The 1995 report on improvements to food commodities provided to schools and other domestic outlets.
- Commodity Supplemental Food Program.
- <u>Food Distribution Disaster Food</u> <u>Assistance Program</u>.
- <u>Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations.</u>
- <u>Food Distribution Support for Child Nutrition Programs.</u>
- Nutrition Program for the Elderly.
- <u>State Processing Program.</u>
- The Emergency Food Assistance Program.

Keep checking our site! New information is being added whenever it is available.

Handling Frozen Mozzarella Cheese

Proper thawing of frozen mozzarella cheese, both regular and lite, is critical to ensure proper melt. Thaw the cheese under refrigeration for 72 hours at 35 °F (best) to 45 °F (maximum) before use. The slower the cheese is thawed, the better. Keep 2 to 3 days' usage thawed so you will not have to use frozen cheese. Use a rotation system (first thawed, first used) to ensure that cheese stays fresh. After thawing, mozzarella is best if used within 7 to 10 days when kept well wrapped at refrigeration temperatures of 35 °F. The fact sheets have been updated to include this information.

Check the product before use, and if the cheese feels wet, it is not completely thawed. It should be put back under refrigeration to complete the thawing process. For proper melting, it is recommended that thawed cheese be heated for 10 minutes at 450 °F in a preheated oven. Mozzarella cheese may stick together, scorch/brown excessively, or not melt during cooking if heated before it is thawed, at too high a temperature, or for too long a period of time. If using the cheese on pizza, it is prefereable to place any additional toppings over the thawed cheese rather than having the cheese on top.

As always, problems with cheese products should be researched. Please report them to your State agency or to the commodity complaint hotline number, depending on the established procedures in your State. If possible, hold the problem product for further examination and evaluation.



USDA wants you to have mozzarella cheese that is "perfecto!"

New Guidelines for Cooking Pasta

C ome schools have had problems With commodity pasta falling apart or turning to mush after being cooked. USDA tested the pasta and concluded that it meets the national standards but is not resilient to extreme cooking measures, such as being placed on steamtables for lengthy periods. To address this issue, USDA has revised the cooking instructions on the pasta labels and updated the pasta fact sheet. These revised instructions tell you to drain and rinse the pasta in cool water. This will stop the cooking process.

The revised fact sheet states that if the pasta is to be used in a dish requiring further cooking or is to be held on a steamtable to serve to the children, you should undercook it slightly. Pasta is done when tender but firm. **Do not overcook**. Please refer to USDA's web site at http://www.usda.gov/fcs/food.htm for the revised fact sheet outlining cooking instructions for pasta. If this does not solve your problems with the pasta, please contact your State agency.

Baked Fruit Bar

| | Weights | Measures |
|---|--------------------------------|---|
| Filling: Date pieces Raspberry puree Lemon juice Salt | 3 lb 3 lb 2 oz 1/6 oz | 3 qt 1 qt 1 pt ¹ / ₄ c 1 tsp |

Combine dates and raspberry puree; cook over low heat until dates dissolve and mixture thickens. Add salt and lemon juice; stir well. Remove from heat, cool.

Crust and Topping:

| Flour | 1 lb 12 oz | 1 qt 3 c |
|---------------------|----------------|--------------|
| Rolled oats | 1 lb 5 oz | 1 qt 3 c |
| Brown sugar | 1 lb 8 oz | 1 qt |
| Baking soda | $^{2}/_{3}$ oz | 1 Tbsp 1 tsp |
| Salt | $^{2}/_{3}$ oz | 1 Tbsp 1 tsp |
| Butter or margarine | 1 lb 8 oz | 3 c |

Combine dry ingredients. Add melted butter or margarine; stir to crumb consistency. Pour half of crumb mixture (approximately 3 lb) into 18" x 26" bun pan; pat to form firm crust. Bake at 350 °F for 12 minutes. Spread filling evenly over baked crust. Top with remaining crumb mixture (approximately 3 lb). Bake at 350 °F for 25 minutes; cool to room temperature. Glaze bars and cut $1^3/_4$ " x $2^1/_2$ ". Yield: 100 bars

| Glaze |
|-------|
|-------|

| Powdered sugar | 2 lb 9 oz | 2 qt |
|---------------------|------------|-------------------|
| S . | 1 lb 5 oz* | 1 qt* |
| Lemon juice | 8 oz | 1 c |
| <i>'</i> | 4 oz* | $^{1}/_{2} c^{*}$ |
| Butter or margarine | 2 oz | 1/ ₄ c |
| Ü | 1 oz* | 1/8 c* |

Combine powdered sugar, lemon juice, and butter to make thin glaze. Drizzle glaze over cooled bars.

Nutritional information per bar: Calories 225; Fat 6.8g; Protein 2.3g; Carbohydrates 40.5g; Fiber 2.9g.

Meal Pattern: Each bar provides ¹/₈ *c fruit/vegetable*; ³/₄ *serving of grains/breads.*

Empanadas

| Weights | Measures |
|----------------|--|
| 2 lb 8 oz | 5 c |
| 110 102 | 1/ ₄ c 1 Tbsp 1 tsp |
| 96 oz | 1 tsp 3 qt |
| 7 lb* 25 lb | 64 large |
| | 2 lb 8 oz 1 lb 4 oz 96 oz 7 lb* |

In a large skillet coated with vegetable spray, brown the ground beef; pour off any drippings. Stir in bell pepper, cumin, garlic salt, and pepper; cook 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in salsa and chopped eggs. Portion bread dough into 4-ounce pieces. Roll out dough into 6-inch circles. Portion ½ cup (#12 scoop) filling in center of dough. Fold dough in half, seal edges, and crimp. Place on coated baking sheets and bake at 400 °F for about 20 to 23 minutes, until heated thoroughly and crust is golden brown. Let stand 5 minutes before serving or transfer to heated holding unit.

*(if using peeled, hard-cooked egg product) Yield: 100 empanadas

Nutritional information per empanada: Calories 338; Fat 7g; Protein 15g; Carbohydrates 52g. Meal Pattern: 1.5 oz meat/meat alternate; 2 bread servings, if enriched; 1/8 c fruit/vegetable.

^{*(}measurements for less glaze)

Dan Glickman

Secretary of Agriculture

Shirley R. Watkins

Under Secretary Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services

George A. Braley

Acting Administrator Food and Nutrition Service

Les Johnson

FDD Director

Rosalind Cleveland

FDD Supervisor, Program Support Team

Mary Kennedy

Editor

Contributing writers: Herb Abraham/Peggy Cantfil/Robyn Consroe/Edith David/ Diane Durant/Leigh Dyer/Linda Ebert/Charlsia Fortner/Chuck Heise/George James/ Rebecca Lee/Connie Stewart/Bonnie Taylor/Ron Ulibarri

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Acronym List

| AMS | Agricultural Marketing | IQF | Individually Quick Frozen |
|-------|----------------------------|-------|---------------------------|
| | Service | NFSMI | National Food Service |
| ASFSA | American School Food | | Management Institute |
| | Service Association | NSLP | National School Lunch |
| CDC | Center for Disease Control | | Program |
| FDA | Food and Drug Adminis- | PSA | Public Service Announce- |
| | tration | | ment |
| FNS | Food and Nutrition Service | SBP | School Breakfast Program |
| FSA | Farm Service Agency | SY | School Year |
| FSIS | Food Safety Inspection | TQSA | Total Quality System |
| | Service | | Audit |
| HACCP | Hazard Analysis Critical | USDA | United States Department |
| | Control Points | | of Agriculture |
| | | VPP | Vegetable Protein Product |

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICE 3101 PARK CENTER DR RM 520 ALEXANDRIA VA 22302-1594

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Food and Nutrition Service Permit No. G-39